

Mapp: Pesticide linked to poisoning used widely in V.I.

By ALDETH LEWIN
Daily News Staff

The local investigation into methyl bromide poisoning on St. John that left a Delaware family hospitalized revealed that several other pest control companies in the territory also use the toxic pesticide.

At a press conference on St. Croix on Wednesday, Gov. Kenneth Mapp said the government will not reveal the names of the additional companies in possession of methyl bromide until a final report is issued.

He said if the companies are using the chemical in an approved manner, they will not be in trouble. If they are found to have misused the pesticide in a residential area—which is restricted—their names will be revealed, Mapp said.

The family of four—Stephen Esmond, Theresa Devine and their two teenage sons, Sean and Ryan—had rented Villa Capri at Sirensa Condominium Resort on St. John from March 14 through March 22.

On March 20, the family was admitted to Schneider Hospital with symptoms of methyl bromide poison-



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ing. Over the course of a few days, all four were airlifted to stateside hospitals for continued treatment.

Last week, the Environmental Protection Agency, which is investigating the incident with the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, confirmed that the chemical found in an adjacent unit was methyl bromide.

The joint investigation found that on March 18, two days before the family was hospitalized, Terminix treated the unit below the one in which the family was staying. Terminix told investigators they were treating for powder post beetles, an insect that eats wood.

Methyl bromide is an odorless gas used as a fumigated pesticide.

However, its use is highly restricted because of its toxicity, and it is not supposed to be used in residential environments.

DPNR has issued two "stop use" orders to Terminix, one for each district, to stop using any product containing methyl bromide and to quarantine any of the chemical that may be in the company's possession.

A criminal investigation has been launched by the U.S. Justice Department, according to documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

"I want you to know, the public to know, that Terminix and the other companies in the territory will be held fully accountable for the misapplication and use of these poisons," Mapp said Wednesday. "They should have known, they are in a position to know, that these poisons have been banned."

Mapp said he has asked the V.I. Licensing and Consumer Affairs Department to join the investigations and conduct a full review of Terminix and any other company that may warrant it.

Mapp said he will wait for the final report from DPNR, which should include recommendations about possible legal action the local government can take.

"We will make a determination if we need to mobilize and implement some additional legal review by our

Tourism tries to assure travelers St. John poisoning isolated event

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The poisoning incident on St. John has received national coverage in the news media, which has led the V.I. Tourism Department to activate its emergency website, www.usviupdate.com.

On the site is a statement on the matter by Tourism Commissioner designee Beverly Nicholson-Doty and a few frequently asked questions with

answers indicating that this is an isolated event and that it still is safe to travel to the territory.

Information about the incident and the investigations will be circulated to local hotels and those in the tourism industry, Tourism spokeswoman Luana Wheatley said in a written statement Wednesday.

"Our sales team will also receive the above information in the event they have to field questions from travel agents and tour operators," she said.

local department of justice," Mapp said.

"We will spare no resources in assisting the family to the extent that they may need assistance. We will spare no resources in ensuring that no other residents or visitor to the territory is exposed to these noxious gases, and we will ensure that the companies who have these gasses in their possession and those that have used them thus far, will pay this government for any and all expenses that we have to endure to bring and rectify this problem," Mapp said.

A spokesman for the Esmond family said earlier this week that Devine has been discharged from the hospital and is doing well; Esmond is improving and stable; but the two boys still are in critical condition.

According to the EPA, the short-term inhalation of methyl bromide can cause severe injury to the lungs. Acute and chronic inhalation of methyl bromide can lead to neurological effects in humans, according to the EPA.